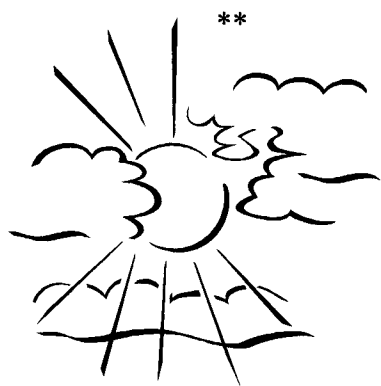


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Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, July 26, 2005

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Rehabilitated or not, young killer will go free

■ Abraham's experience in juvenile system could affect the way judges sentence young offenders.

By FRANCIS X. DONNELLY
The Detroit News

The voice has deepened and shoulders have filled out. He recently received his high school diploma and sometimes leaves the juvenile detention facility that virtually raised him.

Nathaniel Abraham no longer is the wisp of an 11-year-old who coldly shot a Pontiac stranger in the head, becoming one of the youngest

murderers in U.S. history.

Charged as an adult but sentenced as a youth, he is, at 19, all grown up. But has he changed? He has come far emotionally and intellectually, writing poetry and tutoring other residents, say counselors at W.J. Maxey Training School. But he continues to fight with guards and won't admit when he is wrong.

Rehabilitated or not, he will be released from the juvenile detention facility in 17 months, and his subsequent success or failure could affect the juvenile justice system by influencing the sentencing of other violent youths, observers said.

Abraham was Exhibit A in the

need to get tough with juvenile criminals by trying them as adults. But the mood has swung the other way, with legal advocates counseling leniency and rehabilitation.

"If he's successful after he gets out, I think people can come back — whether it's the media or court system — and say that the system works," said Dan Bagdade, his defense attorney.

If a decade of detention can't



Abraham

straighten out Abraham, some judges may wonder whether there's any point to it and be less inclined to send young felons there, juvenile experts said.

It's one more responsibility for the fledgling adult to bear.

"This was a high-profile case," said Harold Timberlake, a youth residential director at Maxey. "You just never know which ways it's going to go."

Last month, 61 residents of Maxey received their GED or high school diplomas during a ceremony inside the chapel of the facility.

Please see Abraham, Page 6A

Abraham

Continued from Page 1A

Wearing green or black caps and gowns, the young felons were watched by family members and security guards as they climbed the altar to take certificates from "Willard J. Maxey High School."

Even as the lanky Abraham celebrated afterward with chicken and soda, he was thinking about an even bigger commencement, his release in January 2007, said his mother, Gloria Abraham.

He hopes to move to a halfway house before then and has already begun venturing from Maxey to perform community service and talk to youngsters about the vicissitudes of crime.

"He tells them: 'When you have freedom, don't mess it up,'" Gloria Abraham said.

Nate Abraham looks for any excuse to slip away from the facility for a few hours. By the time he's released, he will have spent nearly half of his 21 years at Maxey in Green Oak Township. It's the longest stint at the facility, where the average stay is three years.

The second half of Abraham's life has been nothing like the first, according to court files and interviews with family and counselors. Bagdade declined an interview request for his client.

With a father who abandoned the family and a mother who worked nights, Abraham did whatever he wanted, a 9-year-old who often stayed out past midnight.

At Maxey, however, all he knows is control.

From waking at 6 a.m. to lights out at 9 p.m., Abraham is told when he can eat, when he can brush his teeth, when he can move.

Warning signs

When Abraham leaves Maxey, both he and the juvenile justice system will be searching for redemption.

For this is the second time the justice system has had a chance to help him.

The first occurred shortly before the murder in 1997. At the time, his life had already been spiraling out of control for years.

He first smoked pot when he was 6 and began drinking at 10, according to court records.

He also turned violent by 10, threatening to shoot a student on a school bus and shooting his sister and aunt with a BB gun after they had tried to hide it from him.

His mother sought help from the police, who sent her to juvenile court. Juvenile court referred her to the police.

"He is a boy who has been neglected by his home, our community and our justice system," Oakland County Probate Judge Eugene Arthur Moore said while sentencing Abraham.

"He represents our collective failings."

With no limits on Abraham's behavior, it became even more extreme.

In the week leading to the murder, he was suspected of a theft, a

home invasion and beating two teens with a metal pipe, according to police reports.

Finally, on Oct. 29, Abraham was walking home from a friend's home where, earlier in the day, he fired a stolen .22-caliber rifle at a neighbor but missed.

At 10:30 p.m., he spied three men leaving the Sunset Party Shoppe after they bought two 40-ounce bottles of beer, according to trial testimony.

Abraham, who was standing 200 feet away on the other side of a clump of trees, raised the Remington semiautomatic with a missing stock and magazine and shot Ronnie Greene Jr. in the fore-

head.

The two had never met. Abraham's attorney said during the trial that he was shooting at the trees but, during subsequent counseling sessions at Maxey, the youth admitted that he shot at the men for kicks.

When Abraham was arrested two days later in his sixth-grade classroom, his face was painted red for Halloween.

Making strides

Abraham has come a long way from his days as a 65-pound killer.

During his trial, he was described as antisocial and mildly retarded.

Case timeline

■ May 4, 1995: At 9, Nathaniel Abraham begins series of 22 run-ins with police over larcenies, burglaries and assaults.

■ Oct. 29, 1997: Abraham, 11, kills Ronnie Greene Jr. by shooting him in the head from 200 feet away.

■ Nov. 16, 1999: Abraham, tried as an adult, is convicted of second-degree murder.

■ Jan. 19, 2007: Abraham is scheduled to be released from juvenile detention after he turns 21.

MORE ONLINE **detnews.com**

Read previous reports about Nathaniel Abraham at detnews.com/metro.

At Maxey, however, he recently began taking college courses and helps tutor other residents, counselors said.

He has written and hopes to publish two books, one of poetry and one about his life.

He also has become more outgoing, counselors said. He talks more about his problems and what he needs to do to solve them.

"He's evidencing more effort, showing more interest," said Elaine Rosati, a social worker and lawyer who is Abraham's legal guardian.

"He's doing everything he's supposed to be doing."

Despite his progress, Abraham is described by other counselors as headstrong, defensive, combative and moody.

He questions or refuses to follow guards' orders, they said.

When he does something wrong, he blames others.

Maxey wants him to move through five levels of development, but he remains stuck in stage two, where he reviews what got him into trouble and sets goals to avoid such negative behavior.

At a court hearing to gauge his progress in April, he blamed Maxey staff for two incidents where he disobeyed and argued with them.

"I have emotions like everyone else," he said. "At times, people still judge me for what I was then."

Deborah Carley, chief deputy prosecutor for Oakland County, is worried by what she sees as a pattern of Abraham failing to take responsibility for his actions.

If he bucks authority over minor matters in a setting where the consequences are immediate, she asked, what will he do when someone upsets him in the real world?

"We're not talking about an 11-year-old anymore," she said. "It's time for him to step up and make a life-altering choice. If he doesn't, it's squarely on his shoulders."

Moore, who sentenced Abraham, has become a stern mentor. During review hearings, he gives advice to the teen and quizzes him about what he's learned.

Now, he says, the rest is up to the youth.

"If he stumbles, that's his decision," Moore said in a recent interview. "Only you can decide whether you're successful or not."

You can reach Francis X. Donnelly at (313) 223-4186 or fdonnelly@detnews.com.

Youth director job turned down again

However, candidate next in line says he plans to accept offer

PUBLISHED: July 26, 2005

By Jameson Cook
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

The most recent person selected as the new director of the Macomb County youth home has already turned down the job even before being officially offered the post.

Donald Nitz informed Macomb County officials Friday that he would be unable to accept the job as director of the county Juvenile Justice Center because of a "family situation," said county spokesman Phil Frame.

"He was looking forward to coming here, but some personal things came up in the last week," said county Commissioner Susan Doherty, head of the committee that chose Nitz. "He said he would be concerned about how much he could be dedicated to the position."

Nitz, former superintendent at Kalamazoo County youth home, is the second person who has turned down the job this year, adding to the frustration for county officials. The post has been vacant since former director Ronald Gekiere left in May 2004, which followed a 9-month period in which the facility lost its state license. The county also has been criticized for not hiring a minority candidate.

To protect against additional delay, county commissioners had approved a backup plan in case Nitz turned down the post. "Plan B" included an automatic offer to the next candidate in line, Charles Seidelman, who will be handed the job if no problems arise in a background check over the next 10 days to two weeks.

Seidelman, contacted at his job as a probation officer in Paducah, Ky., said he plans to accept the post.

"I'm excited about the prospect of taking the job in Macomb County," said Seidelman, pointing out the challenge of taking over a large, recently built youth home.

Seidelman, 55, who grew up in Holland, Mich., and worked in Ottawa County, and his wife plan to tour the county and the youth home this week or next week.

Seidelman has been working as a probation officer in Paducah since June 1, when he was demoted as superintendent of the McCracken Regional Juvenile Detention Center in Paducah.

Seidelman said the move had nothing to do with his abilities or record but was political in nature. Seidelman is a Democrat, and a Republican recently came into power at the top of his hierarchy.

Doherty said she isn't concerned about the demotion because it appears to be the result of partisan politics.

"That's a very common thing," Doherty said. "If it is something more than political cronyism, it will come out in the background check."

Doherty also noted that the two candidates were virtually equal in qualifications and he's happy to hire Nitz or Seidelman. The vote to choose Nitz was 3-2, with Seidelman receiving two votes. Doherty, who voted for Seidelman, said in her scoring of the two candidates, they were tied. She favored Nitz because he has more experience in Michigan and has a master's degree, while Seidelman has a bachelor's degree.

Seidelman's hiring drew criticism from Greg Murray, spokesman for the Macomb Ministerial Alliance, a group of black ministers who have complained about the county's lack of hiring minorities.

Diane Ransom-McGee, who is black, was offered the job but turned it down in April, and the three remaining finalists, two of whom were black, were not considered, prompting criticism.

A new batch of applications was sought and narrowed down.

Seidelman and Nitz are both white.

Murray accused county officials of applying a double standard in its plan to offer Seidelman the job.

"This process of going to the next-ranked candidate only takes place when you have three white candidates at the top," Murray said. "It raises questions about the integrity of the whole process."

Doherty said she isn't concerned about the alliance's accusations.

"I expect there to be a raucous," Doherty said. "They will be quick to criticize about him being white, but that's being racist because they don't know his qualifications. They will hold it (being white) against him."

Seidelman, who likely would be hired in at nearly the top salary for the post, \$86,000, said he would welcome "being under the microscope" operated by the alliance.

"It would be far worse to come into a community where there were no concerns being brought up," he said.

Macomb youth home finds another chief

*Candidate is third person
named to top job this year*

The Macomb County Juvenile Justice Center appears to have chosen a new director (again). For the sake of the young people who use the facility, the community and county officials, let's hope this decision sticks.

The youth home, which has been without a director for nearly a year, has been plagued by problems including allegations of abuse, loss of its state license and complaints of racism and cronyism in the search for a new director.

Late last week, a candidate with experience in the Kalamazoo County youth home system was selected, but he withdrew his application for personal reasons, says Phil Frame, spokesman for the county Board of Commissioners. Instead, Charles Seidel-

man of Kentucky has been selected for the job, pending background checks and acceptance of the county's offer.

Thus continues the long saga for a search for a permanent director for the youth home. The county's first selection turned down the offer earlier this year and the search firm helping with the selection later pulled out saying it thought county officials were trying to unethically influence the process. County officials have denied those allegations.

Seidelman, who is from Grand Rapids, has worked in Grand Haven as well as Indiana and most recently as superintendent of a youth facility in Kentucky, Frame says.

It is troubling the process has taken so long, but if Seidelman accepts the offer, the juvenile justice center will be a step closer to shedding its past problems and doing what it's supposed to do — helping troubled youths.

Is the system failing African American youth?

By Valerie D. Lockhart
CHRONICLE ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Awakened out of a deep sleep by disturbing thoughts, Monica Kelly rushed into her 15-year-old son's room and called out, "Christopher!"

Her heart sank when there was no answer and upon discovery that he had snuck out of the house in the middle of the night.

Fearing the worst, Kelly called authorities expecting to intervene before her son engages in criminal activities.

"I called his probation officer hoping that he could help," said Kelly. "His answer was to put him into detention. He needs help through specialized services. Like cancer, you can ease the pain with pills but it won't heal the cancer. Throwing him in detention is not helping to solve his issues. He wants to be in control of everything. But taking away his power is not solving anything."

Budget cuts and lack of services for children with anger management, truancy, mental health and other issues have many perplexed about the system.

The Department of Human Services Bureau of Juvenile Justice recognizes that there are flaws in the system, but is working with available resources to resolve them.

"We have to stop dealing with just the political issues and start focusing on what's best for our kids," said Leonard Dixon, bureau director and president of the National Juvenile Detention Association. "The state is studying alternatives to placing kids in detention. Prosecutor Kym Worthy just funded a program in Wayne County to look at abuse, teen domestic violence, drug abuse, non-supportive parents and other negative issues affecting youth. She's going in upfront not looking at how to lock up everyone, but (at) prevention. Another program places probation officers in high crime communities and has resulted

in a 60 percent drop in crime. Once you put services in the community, you can identify needs and achieve true prevention. We can identify problems before kids enter the system."

For three years, Kelly has continuously knocked on doors at the Washtenaw Juvenile Court, only to be turned away. Kelly and others also witnessed unfair treatment of minority youth.

"From my own observations, services provided to African Americans were different from White youth," said Tabitha Harris, a former employee of the Washtenaw County Public Defender's Office. "It didn't seem like they had enough services to help a lot of kids who need help. I've seen problems on the neglect/abuse side of the juvenile justice system."

"I've seen differences in the way clients are treated based on their race. Caucasian clients are treated better. There is stereotyping with African

See Juvenile Injustice page A-7 ►

Americans. It seems like kids are taken away from their parents more often. I knew of one caseworker who wouldn't help a mother who was African American with biracial children. They removed the kids and placed them into custody with their White grandmother. It had to be race because there were no other reasons to remove them from the mother. Even though the mother was caseworker's client, she wouldn't return her calls. Yet, she would call the grandmother back. It wasn't until the mother called Lansing that the caseworker and her supervisor were removed."

Disparities in the number of African American youth entering the juvenile justice system are being reported nationwide.

"The disproportionate number of African American youth in the juvenile justice system is directly related to societal and environmental issues in which the child lives," said Cal Williams, executive director of Children's Aid Society that assists at-risk youth with programs set up in nine out of 13 Detroit Police Department precincts. "The issue of family and economic instability and drugs increases a child's chance for engaging in criminal activity. If the juvenile justice system is to be effective, the whole family has to be stabilized to help a child."

Another concern is minimal, if any, treatment being offered to mentally ill youth, who comprise up to 30 to 40 percent of the juvenile justice system's population.

"Part of this problem has resulted from closure of psychiatric hospitals over the last 10 years," said Roberta Sanders, CEO of New Center Community Mental Health and a member of Gov. Jennifer Granholm's mental health commission. "Children who need those types of services have ended up in the juvenile justice system. Our interfaces are not good, so it's not easy for the juvenile justice system to get children out of their system and into our system. It's well documented that social and institutional racism makes African American and Hispanic youth more likely to wind up in the criminal justice system instead of the mental health system."

Failure of the system to address mental health issues is not new to the Kelly family. Having to deal with the aftereffects of child molestation, coping with the murder of his brother, growing up in a violent household and being diagnosed as bi-polar have taken their toll on Christopher, which caused him to act out in anger and defiance.

"We need to get a team of people all on the same page to help him," said Kelly. "The problem didn't happen overnight, and it will not go away overnight. His father was physical and is still very threatening. He saw his father going in and out of jail. They need to look at the root of the problem. If you have a rocky foundation and the house keeps falling down, build it on sturdy material."

However, the Bureau of Juvenile Justice says every child that enters the system is given a complete medical and mental health evaluation and provided appropriate assistance.

"We have mental health programs in all of our facilities, so our kids have access to those services," said Dixon, who is also a member of the Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice at Columbia University. "We look at the child holistically, and our services address specific mental health problems and medical conditions. Sometimes children develop problems because of poor nutrition, not having glasses or have a physical condition. They may have a hard time concentrating because of their physical problems. The biggest issue we have is trying to ensure that the Legislature does not cut funding for our facilities."

Linda Edwards-Brown, a

Washtenaw County Juvenile Center administrator, said cases like Christopher's are referred to outside sources.

"There are a lot of children with mental health issues," said Edwards-Brown. "The court doesn't have a program for youngsters who are bi-polar but offers a resource to direct people to programs providing that kind of service. They come to our attention because of their delinquency issues. It may be noted in the probation officer's case assessment, but not necessarily noted in their legal file. If (help for mental illness is) not ordered from the bench, it would not be necessarily included in their file."

Early crisis intervention and greater parental and community involvement are needed to compensate for the juvenile system's shortcomings.

"Public and private monies are essential to resolving the high incidence of juvenile justice problems," said Williams. "It is also equally important that agencies that receive funding are held accountable for achievement of goals as outlined by the funding source."

Dixon believes that placing mental health and medical facilities inside all public schools may also deter inappropriate behavior.

"The community can help turn school buildings into community buildings," he said. "Mental health and medical services should be placed in schools like a one-stop shop."

This is a realistic goal because they are doing it in other parts of the country. If we have the will, then we can do it."

Organizations such as Don Bosco Hall, Children's Aid Society and New Center Community Mental Health are helping families, like the Kellys, to regain control through proper services.

"We need to reaffirm that our children are a priority, a valuable resource," said Charles D. Small, executive director of Don Bosco Hall, which has been assisting at-risk youth throughout Michigan for 50 years.

"We need parents to make their children a priority, and we need the community to embrace kids through a village concept. Parents and the community must spend more time with children, instill strong community values and get involved in schools. We offer prevention programs that are designed to work with children at the first

sign of trouble. Recreational and tutorial programs are extended to both children and their families to keep children out of trouble. Our aim is to redirect them and help them to establish goals that will strengthen the family bond."

Strapped at the ankle with an electronic teeter, Christopher no longer sneaks out the house after hours.

While officials question what resources are needed to eliminate juvenile injustice, Christopher offers answers.

"They can be more cooperative and (offer) different activities; stop thinking that detention will solve my problem. It's just putting the problem to the side," he said. "Trips to prison to talk to inmates and see how serious it is, like a scared straight program, may help. My probation officer needs to take a more pro-active approach. It makes me angry when they don't do their job, but they expect me to do everything they want me to do."

Christopher also has advice for his peers.

"When you get into trouble, you may think it's cool but it's a headache and more trouble," he said. "Instead of doing it the hard way, listen to your parents and be obedient. Once you're caught in the system, it's hard to get out. It's like it says in the Bible, if you hang around wise people you will be wise, but if you hang around bad people you will be stupid."

'The disproportionate number of African American youth in the juvenile justice system is directly related to societal and environmental issues in which the child lives. The issue of family and economic instability and drugs increases a child's chance for engaging in criminal activity. If the juvenile justice system is to be effective, the whole family has to be stabilized to help a child.'

- Cal Williams, executive director of Children's Aid Society

'Brat Camp' not an easy decision

Web-posted Jul 26, 2005

By DAVE GROVES
Of The Oakland Press

Some Oakland County residents familiar with troubled teens say fans of ABC's new reality television show "Brat Camp" may not get a full appreciation of how difficult intervention decisions can be.

The show follows a number of teens enrolled in a highly structured, emotionally supportive wilderness camp that offers individual and group therapy.

Elizabeth Gordon, a Bloomfield Hills-based psychologist and educational consultant who has researched hundreds of similar camps and schools across the country, said parents who seek these interventions often endure tremendous stress and frustration first.

"I'm usually not their first stop," she said. "I'm usually the last stop - the one parents make when they're at their wits' end."

Many families employ counselors, church interventions and social service programs only to see their troubled teens continue to act out at home, get in trouble at school and sometimes even encounter legal problems.

At the same time, limited awareness of intervention programs, strained financial resources and difficult emotional issues stand in the way of parents finding help for their children.

"Most feel like failures," said Diane Kimber, president of the Bloomfield Hills-based Spirit Foundation, which assists parents seeking help.

"People don't like to tell those awful secrets for fear people will think less of them. What they don't know is that this is far more common than they imagine."

Commerce Township resident Nancy Stachecki decided to send her son, Robert, to a therapeutic intervention program three years ago after he became belligerent, disrespectful and confrontational. His attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder contributed to behavior issues that resulted in disciplinary action at school.

"You need to realize that you have not failed as a parent, because you cannot change anybody else," Stachecki said. "They've got to want to change themselves."

She and other parents have realized that they can support their children by placing them in programs designed to foster a desire to change. Discovering where to send a child, however, is a complicated decision.

Stachecki said she sent her son to schools in South Carolina and Utah before learning that she was misled about a lack of qualified therapists and a non-supportive environment that also neglected Robert's educational needs.

"It was, basically, like a prison," she said of one school.

Gordon said that while there is a gamut of quality programs designed to meet the needs and interests of all kinds of students, there are also options that can actually be detrimental to children.

"Don't just surf the Web to find something, because there are programs out there that are not good programs, but have a lot of marketing dollars," she said.

With Gordon's help, Stachecki said she found a highly supportive, effective program that is helping her son flourish. With hopes of eventually becoming a sports journalist or a lawyer, Robert plans to attend a college preparatory boarding school in the fall.

Intervention programs such as the one Stachecki employed can cost thousands of dollars per month, though she said she has obtained financial aid and education loans to help offset tuition. Kimber, who also put a child through a costly intervention program, said, "I looked at it like, 'If this was cancer, I would spend my last nickel to save my child's life.' Really, this is no different." Both Gordon and Kimber said any parent growing frustrated with an inability to address prolonged emotional or behavioral problems can benefit from exploring intervention programs. The longer parents wait, in fact, the less hope they may have to help children approaching the independence legal adulthood brings.

"They really need to make a decision pretty quickly as to what the extent of the intervention is going to be, because it is going to end when the child turns 18," Kimber said.

Adoption hearing closed to public

By KIM NORTH SHINE
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A Wayne County Family Court Judge abruptly — and possibly illegally — closed a hearing Monday to determine whether 6-year-old Devin Alexander should be adopted by his foster family or his biological family.

Just before the hearing was to begin in Judge Sheila Gibson Manning's courtroom, her deputy ordered Devin's grandmother, half-sister, a witness in the case and a Free Press reporter to leave.

Gibson Manning's action was "grossly improper," said Herschel Fink, an attorney for the newspaper.

"There's no right without

any justification to close it," Fink said. "The judge should have stated what harm there is in openness."

Closing the public court proceeding likely violated the First Amendment and Michigan open meetings laws, he said.

The Free Press published a front-page story Monday about the battle over Devin's custody between his aunt, Lawanda Harrison of Detroit, and his foster parents, Scott and Rhonda Porter of Taylor.

Bernard Kost, executive administrator for Wayne County Circuit Court, said Monday afternoon that closing the proceedings "is up to the judge's discretion."

He said he doubted Chief Judge Mary Beth Kelly could

overrule Gibson Manning's decision.

A separate court proceeding would be required to formally object to the decision, he said.

Fink said that to legally close a hearing, a judge must state on the record the extraordinary reason for doing so. A judge must also allow parties excluded from the hearing to object and be heard.

Gibson Manning did none of that.

No ruling was made Monday in Devin's adoption. The Free Press is attempting to get access to the hearing, which is tentatively scheduled to continue at 2 p.m. today.

Contact KIM NORTH SHINE at 313-223-4557.

A child is waiting

Devonta seeks brother status

BY ROSEMARY DORR
Special to The Detroit News

To Devonta, adoption means "getting a family for a kid." And he's a kid for whom family is especially important.

The 12-year-old looks forward to visits with his siblings (also in foster care) and adds, "I'd like to be a big brother to little kids. I'd protect them. I like teaching little kids how to read. I like to read myself."

Devonta enjoys outings too, and sports. "I play a lot of sports," he notes.

Despite a difficult past (his mother is deceased), Devonta is growing in character as well as height.

"He's really responsible," says his therapist at the residence where Devonta has lived four years. "He has high expectations of people and likes to right wrongs. He's a great kid, really nice, with an

excellent sense of humor. The staff has only praise for him. He's doing so well in school (he'll be an eighth-grader in special education classes) and is so much happier. He'd be a perfect big brother in a family."

Devonta looks forward to that role. "That's my job," he says. "I don't like it when big kids pick on little kids or on me."

The youngster needs a family that would be loyal and committed to him. Might you consider adoption? Please talk with Amanda Csziado at The Christ Child House, (313) 584-6077, ext. 20.

Last column's child: Steven, 11, likes to play sports and loves to learn. For information, call Deanna Witkovsky at Lutheran Adoption Service, (248) 423-2770, ext. 1135.

A child is waiting appears Tuesdays in Features.



Ricardo Thomas / The Detroit News

Devonta, 12, enjoys playing sports, but also likes reading and "likes teaching little kids how to read."

1 in 7 county residents have no medical insurance

Tuesday, July 26, 2005

SCOTT DAVIS

THE SAGINAW NEWS

For years, the medically uninsured have remained a vague, formless entity -- a mere talking point among politicians.

They now have a number.

Recently released U.S. census figures show that nearly one in seven people lack medical insurance in Saginaw County -- the sixth-highest rate in Michigan.

The statistics show that 29,913 county residents --

14.5 percent of an estimated population of 206,650 -- lack insurance.

Of these, 5,268 are children, or one in 10 of all children countywide.

The census does not provide similar numbers for 1990, so officials cannot say whether the rate of the uninsured has risen or fallen. The recent figures are estimates based largely on the 2000 census.

Saginaw County's rate of 14.5 percent is much higher than the 11.3 percent uninsured statewide, but it's comparable to the nationwide rate of 14.2 percent.

The statistics are of particular interest in Saginaw County, which in recent years has experienced rising numbers of cast-off employees and low-wage workers who officials say can't afford insurance.

"We've been higher than the state because Saginaw has been economically de-pressed," said Randy Barst, executive director of the Saginaw County Department of Human Services, formerly known as the Family Independence Agency.

CONTINUED

1 in 7 county residents have no medical insurance

Page 2 of 2

"It seems we have higher unemployment than the rest of the state."

Ranking higher than Saginaw County were these mostly rural counties: Clare, with 14.9 percent uninsured; Lake, 16.5 percent; Luce, 14.7 percent; Oceana, 15.5 percent; and Oscoda, 15.4 percent.

But Saginaw County compared unfavorably to surrounding counties in the census report. Gratiot County has 12.3 percent of residents uninsured; Tuscola County, 11.5 percent; Bay County, 11.2 percent; and Midland County, 9.3 percent.

Saginaw County's health agencies have noted a rise in recent years in the numbers of low income or uninsured persons seeking treatment.

In February, Health Delivery Inc. reported treating 34,213 in Saginaw County -- 20 percent higher than in February 2004. The federally funded agency is the county's leading provider of medical services for the indigent and uninsured migrant workers.

In 2002, county officials have tried to address the need for insurance among low-income persons by forming the Saginaw Health Plan, a medical insurance plan that is county-subsidized.

In the past year, enrollees in one portion of the Saginaw Health Plan -- a policy targeted for low-wage workers -- doubled to 2,653, said Linda Hamacher, executive director of the plan.

She said the plan provides limited coverage for participants, such as reimbursement for physician office visits,

X-rays and pharmaceutical expenses. It does not cover services in hospital emergency rooms or hospital-based outpatient services.

She said officials are at work on a new plan to improve that coverage. "It provides a full benefit so that people also have hospitalization and a much richer benefit," Hamacher said. v

Scott Davis is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach him at 776-9665.

Cervical cancer rates are highest among poor

■ Feds push program to educate, bridge cultural concerns, but doctors blame lagging health services.

By LAURAN NEERGAARD
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Virtually all deaths from cervical cancer are preventable, yet the disease will kill almost 4,000 women in this country this year. Frustrated scientists know who most of them will be: black women in the South, Hispanics along the Texas-Mexico border, white women in Appalachia and the rural Northeast, Vietnamese immigrants.

Efforts are under way to reach those women, including a \$25 million federal program poised to let communities recruit volunteers — average women who speak their patients' language and can engender trust — to push Pap testing and shepherd the newly diagnosed through an often-baffling medical system.

It's work made more urgent by the discovery that excess cervical cancer is a red flag for other health disparities: The same localities also have too-high rates of breast and colorectal cancer, strokes and infant mortality.

The new report, from the National Cancer Institute, will "hopefully ring a bell for policymakers" in those communities, said Dr. Harold P. Freeman, a cancer specialist who works in Harlem and directs the institute's Center to Reduce Cancer Health Disparities.

Pap smears are credited with slashing cervical cancer deaths by 75 percent in recent decades. This simple \$50 test can detect precancerous cells in time to prevent cervical cancer from forming — or, if it's already there, in time to cure this usually slow-growing malignancy.

But most invasive cervical cancer is found in women who haven't had a Pap smear in five years, or never.

Poverty is one culprit. Also, women with no regular doctor slip through the cracks. Older women are less likely to get a Pap smear, as are recent immigrants, perhaps because of language or cultural issues.

"Cervical cancer shouldn't be a cause of death anymore, in fact it shouldn't be a problem anymore," said Dr. Stephen J. McPhee of the University of California-San Francisco. "Yet here we are in 2005 dealing with a problem that should have been fixed 25 years ago. It's a bad reflection on the U.S. health delivery system."

Cervical cancer

Some facts about cervical cancer disparities, according to a new report from the National Cancer Institute:

■ Black women are more likely to die of cervical cancer than white women; the rate is 5.7 deaths per 100,000 black women versus 3.4 per 100,000 white women.

■ Vietnamese-American women get cervical cancer at five times the rate of white women.

■ Eighteen percent of U.S. counties have no hospital, and cervical cancer mortality is markedly higher there than in counties with hospitals.

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Man pleads guilty in death of infant son in Canton Twp.

Tuesday, July 26, 2005

Ann Arbor News

A 20-year-old Canton Township man pleaded guilty Monday to second-degree murder in the death of his 6-month-old son earlier this year.

Ryan Michael Kierzek pleaded to the charge as his jury trial was about to begin before Wayne County Circuit Judge Thomas Jackson. Kierzek is scheduled to be sentenced on Aug. 18.

Kierzek is accused of killing his son, Tyler Michael Bates, on March 2, at a house in the 300 block of South Haggerty Road in Canton Township.

Canton fire officials responded to the home after receiving a call reporting a sick child. The infant was taken to St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Superior Township, where he later died.

An autopsy showed a skull fracture, severe trauma to the liver and evidence of severe shaking caused the baby's death.

Sex assault suspect enters plea

By KURT HAUGLIE, Gazette Writer

July 26, 2005

HOUGHTON - A 51-year-old South Range man charged with six counts of first degree criminal sexual conduct and one count of second degree CSC pleaded no contest July 18 to the second degree charge in Houghton County Circuit Court in front of Judge Garfield Hood.

Houghton County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney Fraser Strome said James Wakeham entered the no contest plea in exchange for the dismissal of the other six counts of CSC against two girls who were 11 and 12 years old at the time the alleged assaults began in August 2003.

The complaint against Wakeham was made to the Houghton County Sheriff's Office in December 2004, Strome said.

Second degree CSC involves sexual contact with a person between the ages of 13 and 16 and over whom the alleged perpetrator has a position of authority.

In April, Strome said the prosecutor's office offered to allow Wakeham to plead no contest to the second degree CSC. It involved an assault that occurred in November 2003 when one of the girls was 13 years old.

State starts anti-spam registry for children

■ Parents can list kids' e-mail address to stop sex messages, but some argue law's effectiveness.

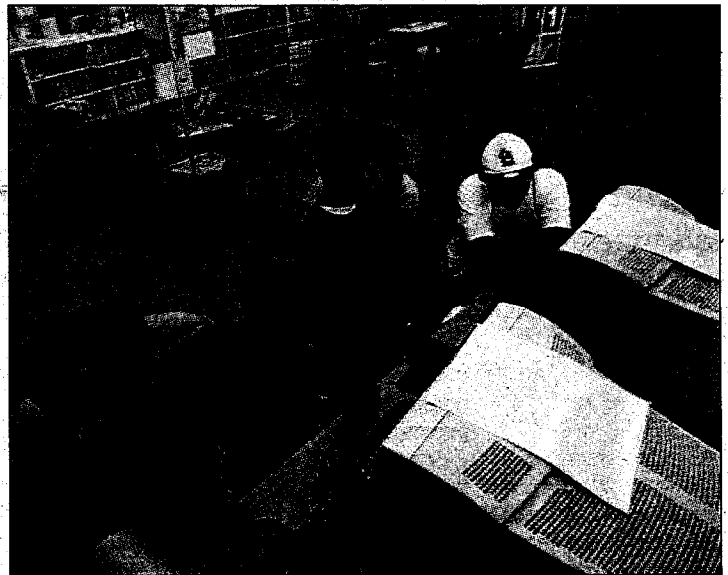
By AMY LEE
The Detroit News

ROYAL OAK — Spammers selling sex have infiltrated Lisa Thompson's Royal Oak home, and they aren't looking for her.

Adult-oriented pop-up advertisements and e-mails routinely arrive on the family computer, shocking the mother of two children, ages 12 and 16.

"I've seen blurry pictures of women, obviously naked, pop up when we've been doing homework," Thompson said. "It's an issue that everyone needs to be aware of. It happens all the time."

Thompson keeps the computer in the dining room to better monitor what her children view, but problems persist. This month, Michigan launched a registry called Protect MI Child Registry designed to help Thompson and other parents stop spammers from sending inappropriate material to children younger than 18. State officials believe it's the nation's first such law.



Milad Kaka, 14, left, Rami Kaka, 12, Paul Kezy, 13, Sydney Abdul, 14, Carolyn Burleigh, 14, and Shanara Reed, 14, surf the Net.

Beginning Monday, spammers must stop e-mailing children whose addresses are registered by the state if they're sending advertisements about pornography, tobacco, gambling, alcohol, illegal or prescription drugs, firearms or fireworks. Parents could start registering addresses beginning July 1, and companies have 30 days after

they're registered to remove children from distribution lists or they face fines or jail time.

It's free to register, and soon parents will also be able to add their children's instant message ID, mobile phone, fax and pager numbers.

Please see E-mail, Page 6B

E-mail

Continued from Page 1B

But some privacy and Internet safety groups argue that while the new law is well-intentioned, the murky world of spammers leaves them skeptical the new law will be effective.

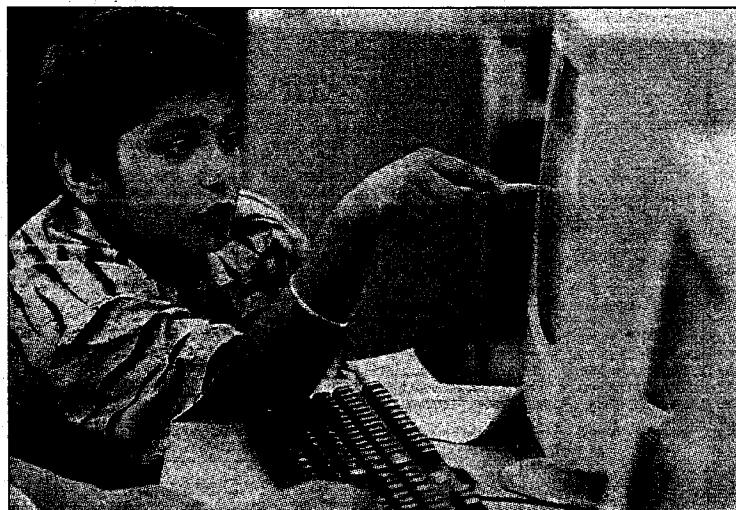
"Whenever you deal with spam, you're dealing with an impossible situation," said Parry Aftab, executive director of WiredSafety.org, an online safety and help group. "A lot of these spammers are not with a registered company that anyone can find. They lie about who they are when they send them. The bottom line is there are unscrupulous spammers, and a new rule isn't going to stop them."

Michigan Gov. Jennifer Granholm earlier this month referred to the registry as a "do-not-call list for Internet porn." Utah lawmakers are also researching implementing a statewide registry of children's e-mail. But Michigan officials acknowledge the registry isn't perfect.

"We've always been clear that this will reduce spam but not eliminate it," said Judy Palnau, spokeswoman for the Michigan Public Service Commission. Thus far, 2,795 e-mail addresses have been entered into the database, and many more are expected to flood in when the school year resumes, Palnau said.

But Aftab said the state should be wary of creating a large database on children, especially because the database is created for the sole purpose of identifying all of the ways someone could contact them.

"All you need is a 13-year-old who thinks it's funny to hack into it to create major problems," she said. "Nothing is hack-proof, and



Brandy Baker / The-Detroit News

Johnny Gill surfs the Net. An online safety group says the state should be wary of creating a large database on kids that hackers can get to.

Protecting children

Parents can block children's e-mail addresses from spammers that send adult-related content.

■ Parents can go online at www.protectmichild.com to register their children's e-mail address.

■ Companies have 30 days to remove the address from distribution lists for up to three years.

■ Parents can register complaints at the same address if marketers violate the law. Penalties can be as high as \$5,000 per message.

that becomes even more important to remember when we're talking about large numbers of children being lumped together in one place."

The company plans to use tech-

nology "stronger than encryption" to ensure the database is safe, said Matthew Prince, chief executive officer of Unspam Registry Services, the company the state hired to create and operate the Protect MI Child Registry. Unspam creates a 27-character code for each individual e-mail address and no one — not even state officials or company employees — will be able to read the original address, he said.

Companies that send huge volumes of e-mail advertisements are already paying attention.

"They're contacting us from all over the place to make sure that they in fact are following this properly," Palnau said.

You can reach Amy Lee at (248) 647-8605 or alee@detnews.com.

Foster care facility reimbursement suspended following inspection

By Matt Whetstone, Cadillac News

CADILLAC - Lakeview Lutheran Manor is not taking Medicare or Medicaid patients after state inspections in May and June.

Meanwhile, the facility is waiting for the state to return for a resurvey after correcting the problems, said Lakeview Lutheran Services spokesperson Barbara Lewis.

The first inspection, which took place in May following a resident's fall reported by the facility, required Lakeview to submit a corrective action plan. Before reinspection took place, Lakeview had its annual inspection in June and nine citations were discovered, Lewis said.

Because Lakeview didn't have a week of being in compliance before the annual inspection, the state took action.

"We're not getting paid for any new Medicare or Medicaid patients right now," Lewis said. "We have submitted a plan of correction - which was all completed by July 5. We're just waiting for the state to come back."

Lewis said an annual inspection covers approximately 340 regulations and she said it is unusual to have no violations.

"Nine citations are something you would expect," Lewis said.

As an example, Lewis said a facility might be cited for having a bag of fertilizer near a back door.

Lakeview always works to correct whatever problems are identified as quickly as possible, she said.

"We're very proud of the work that we do," Lewis said. "We work to provide excellent care and excellent services for our residents."

In the July 6 inspection report obtained from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services, it shows Lakeview having a total population of 144 patients. Broken down, nine are on Medicare, 99 are on Medicaid and 36 have other insurances.

The only identified problem in the report is physical restraints. According to the rule, residents have a right to be free from any physical restraints for purposes of discipline or convenience and not required to treat the resident's medical symptoms.

Based on interviews, staff allegedly used physical means to restrain and restrict the movement of one resident. A staff member allegedly "sat" on a resident in an effort to restrain them.

In the May report obtained from the state, it said a resident sustained a lower leg fracture from a fall. It happened on April 16 when a staff member was attempting to lift a patient into bed "when the chain pulled out and she went to the floor."

news@cadillacnews.com | 775-NEWS (6397)

Cookout offers treat for city's homeless

Monday, July 25, 2005

cricks@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8557

Barbecues and family gatherings are common during the summer for many Kalamazoo-area residents.

But for homeless residents, an invitation to such an event is a rare occasion, said the Rev. Mike Brown, executive director of the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission.

That's why the mission is holding its first Family Fun Day, from 2 to 8 p.m. Saturday in the mission's parking lot, at 448 N. Burdick St.

"People think it's OK for homeless folks to just get three meals a day at the mission and not have anything in their life that's fun," Brown said. "Homeless folks come here 365 days a year, and nobody ever invites them to a picnic or family barbecue.

"They aren't invited anywhere, and there is nothing to break the monotony of their lives," Brown said. "There is nothing to bring any joy."

The Family Fun Day plans to offer enjoyment for at least a few hours. There will be free food, drinks, snow cones, popcorn and cotton candy, along with face painting for children, balloons, games and prizes.

Three different bands -- Blue Heaven Christian Blues Band, Tommy Tomorrow and the Nightingales -- will play throughout the day, Brown said.

Healthcare for the Homeless will have a booth set up during the day and provide information about free health screenings for area families.

The event is free to the public, but there will be areas for people to make donations to the Kalamazoo Gospel Mission if they like, Brown said.

The day is a perfect time for longtime supporters of the mission to drop by and meet many of the residents they are helping, and it also offers a chance for members of the public unfamiliar with the mission the chance to see what the shelter does, Brown said.

The Kalamazoo Gospel Mission is the largest overnight shelter in southwestern Michigan and provides room for up to 250 residents nightly.

It also provides daily hot meals of breakfast, lunch and dinner. Last year about 178,000 meals were served to area residents. With a \$1.6 million operating budget, the mission depends heavily on donations.